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T H E  
PRESENT CONDUCT  
OF THE  
CHIEFTAINS  
AND  
PROPRIETORS OF LANDS  
IN THE

*Highlands of SCOTLAND,*  
Towards their Clans and People, considered  
impartiall

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By a HIGHLANDER.

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*He that getteth Riches, and not by Right, shall leave  
them in the midst of his Days, and at his End shall  
become a Fool. Jeremiah.*

*Be thou a Stream of many Tides against the Foes of  
thy People, but as the Gale that moves the Grass  
to those that ask thine Aid. --- Fingal.*

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Printed in the Year 1773.



THE  
PRESENT CONDUCT  
OF THE  
CHIEFTAINS, &c.

**T**HAT our proprietors in general in the Highlands have exceeded all bounds in raising their rents for some years past, appears too evident from the unhappy effects already produced by their measures, in impoverishing their people, and obliging many of them to leave their own country, because they saw that they could not live in it. Nothing but the most absolute necessity, made them ever think of migrating to another part of the world. Wantonness or humour alone could never occasion such a general inclination and wish to be out of their own country, as at present possesses the Highlanders. For no country whatever had a firmer hold of its inhabitants than the Highlands of Scotland, and this owing to the many strong attachments they had to their native country; and these attachments arose chiefly from the very nature and constitution of Clanship. The people were attached to the persons, families, credit, and interest of their chiefs, and every man looked upon himself as personally concerned to support the reputation of the clan, tribe, family, or country to which he belonged. In this respect, all had, in idea, a common interest. Individuals in the Highlands were also surprisingly attached to the place in which they were born, and where they and their forefathers perhaps lived undisturbed for generations past. It was com-  
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mon to see many families in the Highlands, who had lived on the same spot from father to son, for hundreds of years, without having any property, which made them have a surprising affection for it, and look upon themselves as having a kind of hereditary right to possess it. And where was the harm of this amusing idea? Why should people be hindered from being happy in imagination? It is no good sign of a man's dispositions to rob his fellow creatures of their comforts, however trifling or inconsiderable they may be in themselves.—But modern refinements pay no regard to such considerations.—What then should all of a sudden so far get the better of such ties, as to make the natives prevail with themselves to leave their once beloved country, and go in bodies to a foreign clime? Nothing could do it but the rigorous plan of taxing them, which is generally adopted at present, and most injudiciously executed. Their lands are rented at such a rate, and raised to such a pitch, that they plainly see it is impossible to support the burden laid upon them, or surmount the difficulties they have to encounter. This hath filled their minds with discontentedness, despondency, and despair of doing any thing to purpose in such circumstances at home, and determined them to throw off the yoke. Vast numbers have gone away of late from the Highlands to different parts of Scotland, who had no money to carry them beyond the seas. The spirit of emigration is once begun, and is spreading fast. Many have already landed and settled in our American colonies, and more are preparing to follow them. This spirit began in the western isles, but has now come to the inland parts of the country. The thoughts, views, and general conversation of the people, are now all employed on this subject. It is in vain for any person to think of discouraging them, by setting before them the hardships of a dreary voyage, or discommending the settlements that are to be got



on the other side of the Atlantic. They believe no such thing, but look upon it as the artifice and cant of Landlords; they are very well informed about these things from their countrymen who were over last war, and from those who have already gone from the western isles, who have given the greatest encouragement to their friends to follow; in short they are fully satisfied that the continent of America is a healthy, plentiful, fruitful country; which, to people in want and wretchedness at home, realizes the idea of an earthly Paradise.

I consider the conduct of those who are thus instrumental in driving away their people to a foreign land in three points of view. As hurtful to the state;—as against their own personal and family interest;—and as against religion, justice, and humanity.

When I say, then, that their conduct is hurtful to government, I by no means mean, that it is intentionally so, but only in its consequences. For I am really of opinion, that his Majesty has not more loyal, or more trusty subjects, than the gentlemen and inhabitants in general of the Highlands. But notwithstanding, the measures presently followed by them are against the interest of the state. For if the spirit of emigration goes on, as it is likely to do, and spreads wider and wider, it will carry the ancient inhabitants out of the country, and leave no spirit with those who shall be left behind, and by this means ruin one of the best nurseries which his Majesty has for recruiting his armies.

The Highlanders are a hardy, active, spirited people, and have a natural genius for arms. Our officers in general are fond of them as soldiers. In the last war, the Highlanders themselves composed not an inconsiderable part of the British army. Besides the numbers which were interspersed through the whole army: we had no less than fourteen battalions of Highlanders in the dress of their own country.

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They were often tried and proved, and were always found to be firm, and resolute, and trusty troops. Our commanders in different parts of the world, reposed the highest confidence in them upon the most hazardous and hardy services, and never were disappointed by them. Nay, it may be truly said, that they had no inconsiderable share in making our most important conquests. The reduction of Louisburgh, Quebec, Crown Point, Montreal, Niagara, and Fort du Quesne, the taking of Guadaloupe, the conquest of Martinico, and the Havanna, the plains of Germany, and our conquests in India, will all tell what assistance the government received from the Scots Highlanders. Are these gentlemen, then, friends to our constitution, who are breaking the spirits of those who have showed themselves so fit for supporting its honour? They are really, tho' unintentionally, undermining it. But this is not all; they not only deprive the nation of those who could be extremely serviceable, when there was occasion for them, but send them to the continent of America, perhaps to be some day dangerous to the mother-country. I take it to be an established principle in politics, that the mother-country should always preserve the balance of power in her own hands at home, in order to be respected and obeyed by her colonies, and procure proper authority to her laws among them. Those parents who give all their wealth to their children, without making the proper reserve for themselves, run a great risk of feeling poverty in their old age. Our colonies in America are daily growing in power, wealth, and science, and all the improvements that civilize and polish mankind, and make them formidable to their neighbours. There is no saying that the British empire shall not one day migrate thither, and choose it for her seat. I am not absolutely against sending people to America, but I think it is an unpolitic step to force or promote the migration of whole tribes, or clans, who will not disperse upon going there, but will  
continue

continue firm and united : For all those cements which keep them together here, will grow stronger in a foreign land. Besides, the genius of the Highlanders will fall in at once with the nature of the country, where all men are hunters, and bred to the use of arms. This then, and the continual attention which they must give to keep themselves in a posture of defence against the Indians behind them, will always keep alive and promote a warlike spirit.

Now in case several more colonies shall go from the different clans, as I am certain they will soon, and settle in that country, they will make excellent partizans for the first enterprising genius that shall aspire to form an independent establishment in America. This prospect may be very distant, but is not altogether imaginary. The more then of our clans that leave us, the more the government is deprived of those active hands who were so serviceable in the late war, and who are always ready to be called upon, whenever his Majesty has use for them. One thing may be remarked, that no people in this kingdom are so soon fitted for the field as the Highlanders. Nay, in the last war, regiments of them were at different times sent upon service before they were disciplined. Besides, these gentlemen are acting against the credit and interest of their own families, and defeating their own intentions by their conduct. For what procured so much fame, and credit, and weight, and consequence to many Highland gentlemen of very inconsiderable properties? What made men of much larger fortune in other parts of the nation, look upon them as their superiors in some respects, and as bearing more bulk in the eyes of others? nothing but the train which followed and attended each Chieftain, and looked upon him as the first and leading man among them, who was to be respected on account of his family, whatever his personal qualifications might have been. Hence several gentlemen in the Highlands of only  
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five hundred a year perhaps, and at the head of a clan, were looked upon as more powerful than if they had fifteen hundred in other places without such a following. I by no means hint at their consequence, in those periods, wherein they befooled themselves by turning their arms against our happy constitution. I talk of what they were always thought of, when unconcerned in these acts of folly and ruin. So that our chieftains, by discouraging and discountenancing, and abolishing clanship, have laid down their honours and stripped themselves of those exterior circumstances, which were often valued by many who observed of what consequence they always were to those who did not despise them. In short, they have in the first instance lessened their characters and consequence by their proceedings. But the most extraordinary part of their conduct is, that they do not see how fatal the plan followed by them must be in a little time, to their personal and family interest. They need never expect to draw money from those who have none, or to keep their credit with the world, when their resources are taken away: And that the bulk of the tenants in the Highlands are at present in the most desperate circumstances, will soon be generally felt, and has been partly so already. Bankrupt tenants, and an ideal rental will never enrich a master. Nothing can exceed the avarice discovered by many of the proprietors in the Highlands, for some time past, in raising their rents. To double, triple, and quadruple and often more, was common. They kept close to this one rule invariably, To raise their rents to the utmost; and indeed they have generally succeeded to the extent of their wishes in that respect. For the most part they got as much as they asked; and well they might, because they hardly ever considered the abilities of the offerer, but always accepted of the highest, which has already occasioned an endless confusion amongst their affairs, as many of these people never did or never will

will pay one year's rent. Who were their conductors in this same celebrated plan of ruin and misery? None of their own people, for they have no confidence in them to employ them to do their business. Five or six of the principal estates in the Highlands have been raised in the rents, and sett by agents and gentlemen of the law from Edinburgh, and other places, who know nothing of land till they get a plan of it on paper. Some of them never once saw these lands, till they began to sett them, and then immediately, on coming to the country, in the most forward injudicious manner proceeded to business, without regard to the climate or country they were in, first to augment the rents as much as they pleased, and then to lay down rules and schemes of improving, such as the country of Lochaber, by prescribing to the farmer, or rather grazier, a rotation of Mid Lothian crops, and the several methods of improving ground by turnips, fallow, pease, and grass seeds, and took the tenants bound to follow this infallible scheme; to which the poor people readily agreed, without intending to fulfill any part of it, as they saw it impracticable in their climate: and many of them did not know that such things were in their tacks at all.

These gentlemen have been all along in a capital error; and the leading idea, which one who conducted matters so as to turn a Highland estate to the best account, should always keep in view, never once entered their minds properly; and that is to consider this as a country (principally and many parts of it wholly) fit for cattle and pasture, and not for agriculture and tillage. They have supposed it all fit for tillage and corn, and ascribe the present barren condition of its mountains to the laziness of the inhabitants. What has been the consequence? These rents have never been once paid fully, and never will altogether. This is not all, they have run away very much with the old rent, which was  
always

always a sure one, and well paid. It is an undeniable fact, that at this time there is no such thing as a settled rental on such of these estates as have of late come thro' the hands of these operators:—the whole is fluctuating, none of the proprietors can tell what he has to depend on at Martinmas to answer his credit. This confusion seems only to be beginning; and it is extremely like, that some of those estates will not for many years recover the shock they have received from the mismanagement of these conductors. Is it not most extraordinary that their employers did not discover their lameness and unfitness for the business which they undertook? What could they expect from such as never had any practical knowledge of husbandry? The proprietors, I suppose, imagined there was much difficulty in raising their rents, and thought their doers had great merit in doing this to such good purpose. Any man of common sense might show them, that it is the easiest thing in the world to raise rents. First reduce your people to the necessity of removing, or else coming in to your terms; remove a few; these will fall upon the possessions of others. And thus by playing them off properly, the one against the other, you may go any length you please while the humour lasts, and get poor people to promise whatever you choose to exact. How are our Proprietors now pleased with these men of business, to whom they made over the supports of their family, honour, and credit, I mean their estates and people, to use them as they pleased? several of them have already lost the flower of their people by the bargain, more of them will soon do so, and all of them have already been obliged to drop hundreds of their original airy rent-roll, which was so pleasing in idea. They may curse the day on which they thought of employing them; their children who are yet unborn will say it was an unlucky one for them. It is a reflection on  
their



their judgments to have pitched on such people to conduct their matters, and not to be able to do their own business, at least the leading part of it, in their own country, and amongst their own people, to much better purpose than could be expected from men who had no knowledge of either, and in short were destitute of all the requisites for such an undertaking. It appears very extraordinary to me, that any man with his eyes open, who saw the method in which these men proceeded, could miss of discovering the absurdity of such doings. It is really odd that the exorbitancy of their exactions did not startle the minds of those whose credit was to depend on the punctuality of their payments. They may be convinced now, that the whole fabric was only theory and airy speculation, which failed whenever it was applied to practice.

I know I shall be told, that the bad seasons for two or three years past, and the loss of cattle in the Highlands, have contributed very much to impoverish the people. Granted. If so then, tho' I'm persuaded the rents, as they are at present, would soon ruin them in the best of times, is it not cruel and ridiculous in the proprietors, to rack their rents in the worst of times? should they not wait till it is the will of Providence to send better years? But this is not all; several estates in the Highlands have been raised before the twolast bad years; notwithstanding of that, how broken have the payments of these rents been? And if God has sent pests and mildews, and a famine of provender for beasts, which swept away such numbers of cattle: are the proprietors to look upon themselves as unconcerned in these dispensations of Providence? If they could find out that they and their people have but one interest, and that their prosperity depends entirely upon their people, they ought to look upon the hard seasons as messengers sent by the Almighty to themselves, warning them to desist from

grieving his people; nay, as striking at the very root of their avarice, and taking away the object of it, by disabling the poor tenants from satisfying it. God has taken to himself, in his Providence, what was to have been a prey to the avarice of those who think all that their dependants are possessed of belongs to the master. In short, there is such a concurrence of causes at present working out the ruin of the people, betwixt the hard seasons on the one hand, and the severity of the masters on the other, that it would look as if providence was beginning to bring about some remarkable change in the Highlands of Scotland, and intended to remove the antient inhabitants of it. Thus making the superiors of the country defeat their own purposes, by their own measures, which in the end will turn out to be a punishment for their conduct. It is plain then, that our Chieftains are manifestly acting against their own interest, as their conduct has already contributed very much to ruin their people, and to promote a spirit of emigration amongst them to a degree that is much more alarming than has as yet been seriously attended to. For what will their lands signify when they have them? From whence will they get tenants? And when any of them may happen to think of selling any part of his estate: who in his senses will purchase an unpeopled and deserted country?

Let us next see how repugnant these measures are to the law of God, justice, and humanity. Do they look upon themselves as innocent, because their conduct is not contrary to the law of the land? There are many crimes of a deep die, which do not come under the cognizance of that law. But their conduct is contrary to an older law, which has more awful sanctions attending it; that is, the law of God, of nature, of humanity. Who are these people who have already been forced, nay torn from their native country, by taxes which they were not able

able to bear, and all those remaining as yet at home, but the friends, the relations, the connections, nay people who always till now looked upon themselves as the very children of those men who have thus dealt with them. Surely, the more good ties that unite men in society together, the more strength and firmness society thereby acquires. Why then should any of them be destroyed? Can any one applaud men who have steeled themselves against those to whom they were so dear; and by whom they were so beloved? I should imagine that a man possessed of good principles, and of worthy generous-spirited sentiments would rejoice at the very thoughts of having the affections of so many people bound up in his person and interest, and wishing always for his prosperity; and that he would esteem it as his pride and honour to take care of those who looked upon themselves as under his protection.

This actually was the case a few years ago. It is not so now. Our chiefs have banished from them the good affections of their people. Why did God give them power? was it to abuse it? Are they not accountable for the abuse of such a gift? It is a talent put into their hands by Him who tempers power with wisdom and clemency. Is there no injustice in their actions, because they are done publicly? Is it not injustice to take more than value for any thing you give another? The husbandman has as good a right in the eye of God, to have pennyworth for the rent he pays, as the landlord has to have rent for the land he lets. He has a right to more than barely to live; to live in an easy, comfortable, plentiful manner, without profusion or abuse. This ought to be the reward of his honest industry. Many of our people in these times, do no more than barely exist. Can it be agreeable to that Being, who wishes well to all his creatures, and with whom there is no respect of persons, to see hundreds, and thousands kept in poverty and want, in order to satisfy and support



support the avarice and luxury of one person, or family? It is clear that such are greater criminals in the eye of Divine Justice, than many who daily suffer for taking things of very inconsiderable value from their neighbours. Are there no robbers but highwaymen? yes, and more dangerous and pernicious ones. Those who deprive men, women, and children, of food and raiment, and comfort, and render them unhappy and miserable, and perhaps drive them to ruin by this means, are men of that character. There are thieves who never stole, and murderers who never took away the life of a fellow creature. The word of God tells us, (1 John iii. 15.) that "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." Now what greater sign of hating their fellow creatures can there be, than mens grinding their very faces? sure I am such a conduct is totally contrary to every degree of benevolence. Certainly, next to the taking away the life of any of our fellow creatures, is the crime of taking away from them the means, and supports, and comforts of life. Whoever is instrumental in making life a burthen to men, and puts them into a situation that wears them out with care and anxiety and fatigue, is a public enemy, not only to their properties, but to their very lives and existence. Is it not ruin and destruction to families, to disperse them by taking from them the very means which kept them together, and to force parents to part with their children, and to send them away to shift for themselves, almost as soon as they can walk, perhaps never to see them any more? Shall not such scenes of distress as are daily to be seen in this impoverished country, touch the hearts of those who chiefly occasion them? Let them remember that men are not always innocent, when they think themselves so, or that there is no danger hanging over the guilty, but what is visible. Let them not harden their hearts as Pharaoh did, when he had the Israelites in bondage. He would neither let them go, nor use them well

well while he had them ; nor would he see his crime till the vengeance of heaven came upon him. In the destruction of Pharoah and his host, we see how hateful tyranny, oppression, and severity of every kind and degree, are in the sight of God. Will the Almighty see his creatures now ill-treated, and take no notice of those who do such things? Eccl. iv. 1. “ I considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun, and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter ; and on the side of the oppressors there was power.”——It is remarkable, that in the account of the last day given by our Saviour, (Matth. xxv.) the want of compassion for the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, happens to be the only crime mentioned there against those dismissed to everlasting misery : which shows it to be in the highest rank of offences in the sight of God, who looks upon whatever good or evil is done to his creatures as done to himself ; and we are told, that whoever “ does not love,” or hates or hurts the creatures of God, which are the works of his hands and his children, cannot have any real love, or regard, or reverence for their Maker. If then, the want of compassion be such a crime, what is the guilt, what will be the punishment of positive severity, and hard-heartedness ! If it be so sinful not to supply the need, when in our power, how heinous must it be to increase the number of the miserable, and reduce those in plenty and affluence to a state of want and poverty, by taking their necessities and comforts from them ? Whether they are spoiled of their effects at one time by open violence, or drained of them by degrees, by measures that are seemingly lawful, comes all to the same purpose. How tremendous are the threatenings of the Almighty against such as acquire wealth by distressing their poor dependants ! James v. 1. “ Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver  
“ is

“ is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire : ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth ; and the cries of them which have reaped, are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”

But religion loses her labour in speaking to those who have shut their ears, and are determined not to hearken to her precepts. “ Has no consideration then weight enough with you all, who are proprietors of this country, to convince you that you are in the wrong, to your people, to your country, to yourselves, and to God Almighty ? Will nothing persuade you to alter your measures, and embrace your people again ? If ye should have no religion, have ye no sense of shame or honour, have ye no regard for character, humanity or self-interest ? Have ye enriched yourselves by your doings, or have you a prospect of doing so ? The reverse, I am afraid. Ye then that lord it over your people, and live voluptuously at the expence of so many of your fellow creatures, look to your tables covered, yea lavished over with what ye had no right to take from those who had not enough of common food for themselves. Consider your luxury as in a great measure the purchase of your innocence ; your excesses in every respect as supported by those whom ye have left hungry and naked and cold. Think on your own children, and reflect on the affection and tenderness ye have for them, and how they ingross the whole of your care and attention. Should not this make you feel for the hundreds of naked starving children that are to be seen in every estate in the Highlands, because their parents have not enough to feed or cloath them ? Will nothing make you feel for your distressed people ? what a spectacle !

“ to



“ to behold thousands of them leaving you to  
 “ take shelter in the woods of America. Sup-  
 “ pose you saw a body of them embark this mo-  
 “ ment ; men, women, and children, yea, the aged  
 “ themselves, bidding farewell to the friends and re-  
 “ lations they leave behind, and to the spot of their  
 “ nativity, and with minds full of indignation at  
 “ your usage of them. Would such a scene as this  
 “ move you ?

“ Are you not ashamed, that ye are condemned  
 “ by all but yourselves ? I now speak the senti-  
 “ ments of thousands concerning your conduct.  
 “ Do not you blush at the thought of the account  
 “ which these poor sufferers will give of your severi-  
 “ ties in a distant part of the world ? and that your  
 “ fame is already published throughout the conti-  
 “ nent of America ? what shall all men of humanity  
 “ think of you, when they shall see your people  
 “ obliged to go so far for the means of life ? what  
 “ kind of men will the Indians themselves, who all  
 “ live in clans and tribes, and are protected by their  
 “ chiefs, take you to be, who have by your cove-  
 “ touness expelled your people ? they will call you  
 “ void of spirit and humanity. Nay, when the  
 “ chiefs of savage nations, who are careful of their  
 “ followers, shall hear the story, they will call  
 “ you Barbarians. Look then to your interest be-  
 “ fore it is too late ; consider your having your  
 “ people and their all in your power, as a trial of  
 “ your clemency and humanity. Correct yourselves  
 “ in time then, before your affairs become despe-  
 “ rate : for the loss of your people will bring you  
 “ all into difficulties of which ye have not as yet  
 “ thought. I actually see the storm gathering a-  
 “ round me, and swarms of your people preparing  
 “ to leave yourselves, your lands, and your oppres-  
 “ sions. If a stop is not speedily put to this spirit,  
 “ it will soon be to no purpose to attempt it ; for,  
 “ once they get themselves thoroughly reconciled  
 “ to

“ to leave their own country, and are prevailed u-  
 “ pon to go and live at such a distance from it;  
 “ the main obstacle is then removed out of the way;  
 “ and when once a respectable body of them is gone  
 “ over and settled, others will think nothing of fol-  
 “ lowing them, because they only go to be amongst  
 “ their own countrymen. In short, if your peo-  
 “ ple persevere in their present resolutions, and if  
 “ the spirit of emigration is once thoroughly esta-  
 “ blished amongst them, which two or three more  
 “ colonies sent from the Highlands will effectually  
 “ do; depend upon it, that this will drain your  
 “ estates of people, of labourers, and of tenants  
 “ to such a degree, as will in the end overturn the  
 “ very foundation of your present prosperity.”

F I N I S.

